[Kelly Koss was a junior Art major and Psychology minor at Kalamazoo College when she wrote this Observation Report (Spring 2003).

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Observation Report
Kelly Koss

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Note to the reader: The names within this paper have been modified to protect the identities of the children involved in my observations.

Observation #1: "John" and aggression

Date and time: Wednesday April 16, 2003; 11:25-12:50
Setting: Playground for 1st/2nd grade recess 11:25-11:50, 3rd/4th grade 11:55-12:20, Kindergarten recess 12:25-12:50
Activities observed: Children climbing across the climbing rings, watching children pretend play at the tire mountain and under the large wooden play structure with the blue plastic slide.
My interaction with the children: I spent a lot of time answering questions about my name and where I am from for the children.

Example A:

There was one child named "John" on the first recess who was racing across the

rings with another child, lost the race and fell to the ground. He then started to cry and

called himself a loser. I pulled him aside to try to talk to him to find out what was wrong.

He kept telling me that he was a loser because he didn't win the race and he never wins,

and that "all my friends think I am a loser because I cry all the time. They make fun of

me because I cry. They beat me up. I am a loser." I tried to reassure him and tell him I

did not think he was a loser. I explained how I thought one of the reasons he lost the race

was because he had been climbing across the rings for most of recess was tired from

racing. He continued to cry even after his friends came over and tried to get him to play.

He just sat in the sand sobbing, so I tried to tell him that his friends came over and asked

him to play so it did not appear that they think he is a loser. He said they would beat

him up. I tried to get him to go and see if they would play; initially, he refused to interact

with his friends but then he got up and tried to find his friends. He searched for a few

minutes and when he could not find them he started crying again and walked away from

me.

Date and time: Monday, April 21, 2003; 11:25-12:50
Setting: Playground for 1st/2nd grade recess 11:25-11:50, 3rd/4th grade 11:55-12:20,
Kindergarten recess 12:25-12:50
Activities observed: Children playing on the playground, I was mostly by the climbing
rings.
My interaction with the children: I spent most of the 1st/2nd grade recess assisting the
children with the climbing rings and diffused a fight, for 3rd /4th grade recess I watched the
children play on the swings, Kindergarten recess I ran around with some of the children.

Example B:

I spent a lot of time lifting the short children onto the climbing rings during (first

and second grade recess) so they could race with one another. John was having fun and

encouraging the other children as they crossed until a different boy was almost across the

rings. John walked underneath him and pulled on his legs until he fell off the rings. After

that the boy grabbed John's shirt because he was mad that John pulled him off of the

rings. He asked John "why did you do that?" John did not answer, so the boy pulled on

his shirt and hit him in the arm. John began crying at that point and started yelling, "He

hit me! He hit me!"

I diffused the fight by pulling the boys apart from each other, and tried to get

both of the boys to talk to me. The boy that hit John just walked away and did not want

to listen. So, I helped John stand up and asked him why he thought the other boy might

have hit him. He said he did not know why the boy would be angry with him. I asked

him what he had just done to the boy to provoke such a reaction. He told me that he all

he did was pull the other child off of the rings. He did not appear to understand that his

actions might have been the reason that the other boy hit him. I tried to get him to role-

play the other child's part with me but he refused. So, I attempted to talk to him and

explain that hitting and pulling and pushing are not very polite, and suggested that

perhaps he should try to talk to others instead of hitting them. He did not say anything

else and went back to play with some of his other friends.

There are two different types of aggressors: proactive and reactive. Proactive

aggressors are highly aggressive children who rely heavily on the use of aggression to

resolve social problems. They are confident that they will benefit from participating in

aggressive acts (Shaffer, 2000). Reactive aggressors on the other hand, are children who

demonstrate high levels of retaliatory aggression because they are often weary of their

peers and view them as having malicious intentions (Shaffer, p. 281). It is possible to

examine these two types of aggressors' cognitive processes in ambiguous social situations

by utilizing Dodge's Social Information Processing Model.

Dodge suggested that there are six cognitive processes that will lead to a child's

response to a social problem: encoding social cues, interpreting social cues, formulating

social goals, generating problem solving strategies, evaluating the likely effectiveness of

different strategies, and enacting a response (Shaffer, p. 281). Since every child is unique

with an individual blend of traits it is possible for different children to have difficulties

within various steps of this model. A reactive aggressor may have problems encoding

social cues because he frequently contributes a hostile attributional bias to his peers.

Shaffer defines the hostile attributional bias as: "tendency to view harm done under

ambiguous circumstances as having stemmed from a hostile intent on the part of the

harmdoer" (p. 282). Another child who is considered a proactive aggressor may vary

from the reactive aggressor and have difficulty with generating problem solving strategies

portion of Dodge's Model and rely on only the aggressive strategies he frequently uses

social situations to resolve conflicts instead of trying other less aggressive techniques. In

this particular situation (with John and the climbing rings) he may have had problems in

the formulating social goals step of Dodge's model. I believe this may be the case because

when I asked him why he pulled the other child off the climbing rings he had no concrete

reason for behaving in such a manner. He did not think ahead to the implications of

pulling the other child off of the climbing rings, thus leading him to "become stuck" on the

formulating social goals component of Dodge's model. It is possible that through social

skills training and coaching that John could be taught to think ahead to what goals he

would like to accomplish in various social situations. He would then be able to consider

the possible outcomes of committing various actions, and possibly reduce the number of

aggressive acts that he engages in.

Another interesting aspect of aggression to examine in John's case is Berkowitz's

revised Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis. Berkowitz's theory is based on Feshbach's

original frustration hypothesis. Berkowitz believed that frustration creates only a

"readiness for aggressive acts", and that an act of aggression may not occur if there are no

"aggressive cues" present to trigger an act of aggression (Shaffer, 2000, p. 278). An

aggressive cue is an object or event that was previously associated with aggression that

increases the likeliness that an act of aggression will occur (Shaffer, p. 278). So it is

possible that when John was losing the race on the climbing rings that he interpreted his

defeat as an aggressive cue, since he seems to equate his defeats with his experiences of

his friends wanting to beat him up.

Observation #2: Pretend Play

Date and time: Wednesday April 16, 2003; 11:25-12:50
Setting: Playground for 1st/2nd grade recess 11:25-11:50, 3rd/4th grade 11:55-12:20,
Kindergarten recess 12:25-12:50
Activities observed: Children climbing across the climbing rings, watching children
pretend play at the tire mountain, and under the large wooden play structure with the
blue plastic slide.
My interaction with the children: I spent a lot of time answering questions about my
name and where I am from for the children.

There were three boys under the smaller wooden play structure (with the blue

plastic slide) digging a hole to the center of the earth and trying to throw a magical mineral

in the sand to beat the bad guys. They were establishing rules as they went along: One

boy said, "We're digging a hole to the bottom of the earth."

Another responded with, "Yeah, we have superpowers."

A third boy then said, "We're going to have a battle with the bad guys."

The first boy then argued, "No we're not, we are going to drop this to beat the

bad guys."

The other three boys simply agreed by saying, "Okay", and continued digging until they got to the bad guys. They then dropped the magic mineral in.

Artin Göncü, Michelle B. Patt, and Emily Kouba (2002) define pretend play as, "an activity framed by metacommunicative messages and it embodies representation of emotionally significant experiences" (p. 419). Pretend Play is a key part of a child's social development. Professor Tan has noted that a child who does not regularly participate in pretend play is often under great emotional stress and a lack of pretend play is often a sign that the child may need counseling in order to aid his/her normal development (Tan, personal communication).

Sociodramatic play helps children develop strong social skills because it involves "negotiation at every point" (Tan, personal communication). Children learn how to understand how others perceive the world and how to compromise when they disagree on issues within the story they are creating. This peer interaction is also integral to their development as they are able to form horizontal (reciprocal) relationships with other playmates through the context of pretend play. Studies have demonstrated that children who are shy and withdrawn and engage less often in social interaction with peers than normally developing children often fail to develop important social skills and become rejected children as they move into middle childhood (Rubin, Burgess, & Coplan, 2002). Shy and withdrawn children often have over-involved parents who will intervene when the child is faced with a conflict and solve the problem, which puts the child at a disadvantage because he/she is not learning important social skills, such as compromise, and generating solutions to social problems on his/her own (Rubin, Burgess, & Coplan, p.

336). Thus, it is important for all children to engage sociodramatic play (play in general) with other children as it serves an important purpose in allowing children to directly experience disagreements, as well as allow them to generate creative problem-solving strategies, develop a sense of empathy and flexibility, and learn to compromise. They can then transfer the skills they learn from the negotiation involved in sociodramatic play to other aspects of their lives and improve their relationships and reputation among peers.

The children observed on the playground are probably extremely well practiced in the area of pretend play as children begin pretend playing as soon as they can symbolize and separate fantasy from reality. As children become older their pretend play becomes more complex and they utilize fewer concrete ideas in their play. Older children are more likely than younger children to engage in sociodramatic play. Thus, relating to Parten's Social Levels of Play: as children become older their play becomes more interactive and cooperative. They begin as infants at the unoccupied play level (where children spend a lot of time wandering), they then move on to solitary play (where they have no involvement or even demonstrate an awareness of others playing around them). They then move to onlooker play (where a child watches other children play), then to the level of parallel play (where multiple children play nearby with the same toy in the same fashion but do not interact). They continue to move closer to cooperative play through associative play (where children engage in a common task and communicate with each other, but they do not assign specific roles or goals to everyone). The final step in these social levels of play is the cooperative play level (where children consciously create a group and set out to accomplish a common goal by assigning roles, tasks, and

responsibilities) (Seifert, Hoffnung, & Hoffnung, 1997, p. 226). Parten noted that "parallel and solitary play appeared to decline throughout the preschool years, whereas associative play and cooperative play, which involve greater social participation, increased with age" (Seifert et al., p. 226).

When children begin pretend playing their stories are not very elaborate and rely heavily on concrete representations, but as children get older their storylines and representations move farther from their daily experiences. Catherine Garvey found that children between two and four years of age develop roles and settings, but do not begin to develop plots from those roles and settings until four years of age (Tan, personal communication). As children get older they also spend more time paying attention to their partners' pretend play ideas, as demonstrated by the boys as they acknowledge that one of the children does not want a battle with the bad guys, he simply wants to drop the magic mineral in the hole to beat the bad guys.

It is interesting to note that in order for these boys to engage in such elaborate pretend play they need to have a theory of mind. They must be able to simultaneously process factual and non-real representations (Lee, & Homer, 1999). They cannot confuse their imagined world with reality, children who cannot make this distinction do not engage in pretend play (an example of this is autistic children). Autistic children do not engage in pretend play on their own because they exhibit "mind-blindness". They cannot make correct inferences about others' ideas, beliefs, and perceptions (Tan, personal communication). Thus, it would be impossible (or extremely difficult) for autistic children to participate in the same elaborate imagined scenario that was concocted by the

boys on the playground. In this example the boys in the playground understand that

their bad guys and magic minerals exist in nothing more than their imaginations, whereas

autistic children have a more concrete vision of the world.

Observation #3: Play Environment and its influence on behavior

Date and time: Wednesday, April 30, 2003; 11:25-12:50
Setting: Classroom for 1st/2nd grade recess 11:25-11:50, Gym for 3rd/4th grade recess
11:55-12:20, Gym for Kindergarten recess 12:25-12:50
Activities observed: 1st/2nd graders watched a movie because the gym was in use, the
3rd/4th and Kindergartens played with basketballs and jump ropes in the gym.
My interaction with the children: I spent the first part of 1st/2nd grade recess trying to
quiet the children and sat and watched a movie with them. I twirled the jump rope for
some 3rd/4th graders. I mainly supervised the Kindergartners in the gym during their
recess.

The children seemed particularly rambunctious in the gym during indoor recess as

the space was crowded and children did not have ample space to jump rope or play with

the basketballs. The children seemed to engage in more rough and tumble play than usual,

and did not seem as willing to stop inappropriate behavior when told to do so. In both

the third/fourth grade and Kindergarten recess children kept trying to climb the pull up

bars after being told repeatedly to stop the behavior. Asking the children what level they

were functioning on and asking them how they were going to get up to a "C" or "D" level

did not seem to help any.

On a sunny day however, children play outside on the playground. Woodward

School's playground consists of a variety of play equipment: one old metal play structure

consisting of a slide and climbing rings; two larger wooden play structures, each equipped

with a slide, pole, and a few platforms. The larger wooden play structure is also built to

look a bit like a castle with two large enclosed towers. There is also a large pyramid shaped tire tower, a large tire bouncer made of multiple tires, a set of swings, and two smaller tire swings. There is a track and a large field in the center of the track with soccer goals where children are free to play organized sports and run around.

According to the play environments article written by Francis Wardle (1999), there are certain spatial criteria that need to be met to keep children from engaging in too much rough and tumble play. Too much space or too little space per child can cause the levels of aggressive incidents among children to rise (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey). Smith and Connolly (1980) conducted an experiment where they utilized spatial densities of 15, 25, 50 and 75 square feet per child; they found that "reducing the space per child resulted in a reduction in the amount of gross-motor activity during play" (as cited in Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, p. 247). When space was reduced from 25 to 15 feet per child the incidents of aggression increased (as they had when children were granted over 25 feet of space) and there was a significant decline in group play (Johnson et al., p. 247). Therefore, too much space and too little space in the environment can significantly change how children choose to interact with one another, an ideal play environment would probably grant children no more or no less than 25 feet per child. It is my inference that the reason children behaved more aggressively in the Woodward gym than outside on the playground was due to an overcrowding of children (too low a number of footage per child). A possible solution to easing tension in the gym at Woodward School for indoor recess would be to open up a classroom to quiet play, thus reducing the number of children gathered in the gym at once.

Research indicates that the cognitive forms of play change when children play outdoors and indoors. Children are more like to engage in gross-motor play outdoors and constructive play indoors (Johnson et al., 1999). This was not the case in the gym however, as children did not have activity centers to work in but merely toys that induce gross-motor activity, such as basketballs and jump ropes. In most situations basketballs would be conducive to generating games with rules where children work cooperatively together toward a common goal, however, I think that due to the large number of children crowded in the gym that the multiple basketballs had a reverse effect on cooperative play. They only helped generate individual gross-motor activity, as there was not enough room to play basketball as a group without constantly having children who were not part of the game running through the court and being hit with stray basketballs.

Outdoor recess tends to be less rambunctious as children are not crowded into the gym with too little space to engage in non-aggressive and cooperative play. There are a few aspects of the Woodward playground that make it a particularly effective area in which children can play without copious amounts of aggression. Linkages between pieces of equipment help children play without aggression. One of large wooden play structures consist of a pole, cargo net, a few platforms and a slide all linked as one cohesive play piece. Linkages allow children to move fluidly from activity to activity and furnish them with the ability to gather in a central area and interact with one another in a productive and prosocial manner (Johnson et al., 1999, p. 270). The playground also offers a variety of challenges for children of varying ages. Examples of this graduated challenge are the three sets of climbing rings on the playground; there is one set that is extremely close to

the ground for younger children to utilize, and then two taller sets for children to use as

they get older. This graduated challenge ensures that children are offered developmentally

appropriate activities so they do not become bored with having too much or too little of a

challenge (Johnson et al., p. 271). Woodward's playground also grants children the

opportunity to participate in a variety of activities while on the playground. Variety is

important in getting children's attention and helping them commence in play activities

(Johnson et al., p. 271). Woodward's playground offers children options to engage in

organized games in the large open field and blacktop near the basketball hoops, pretend

play on the castle play structure as well as under and on top of all the other play

structures, play independently on the swings, constructively play in the sand, socialize

with friends on the wooden benches on the edges of the playground, or play as a group on

the large play structures. This variety helps prevent children from becoming bored and

picking fights with each other as they can easily move from activity to activity.

Observation #4: The Slide Game

Date and time: Wednesday, May 7, 2003. 11:25-11:50
Setting: Playground near the large wooden play structure with the blue plastic wavy
slide.
Activities observed: 1st/2nd graders playing a game where they would try to put as many
people on the top half of the slide at once without sliding to the bottom.
My interaction with the children: I observed their behavior and cautioned them to play
safely.

The children came running out to the playground for first and second grade recess

and about seven children who normally play together decided to play on the blue plastic

slide. Initially, the children were taking turns sliding down with two children waiting at

the top making sure everyone was sliding in the proper order; eventually one boy emerged

as a facilitator. He suggested that they slide down the slide sideways, stop in the middle

of the slide, and see how many children they can pile on the top half of the slide before all

of them slide to the bottom. The children seemed pleased with this idea and they

modified their game as instructed. The game continued the entire duration of the recess,

as six other students were able to successfully enter the game. One or two children

attempted to enter by watching the turn taking and were allowed to enter into the sliding

order after observing a few other people sliding and asking to join in. Another few

children simply joined by jumping in at the end of the sliding line and continuing with the

game. There was only one child who was not allowed to enter the game, "Tim" jumped in

the line and slid feet first after a few children were stacked up on the slide sideways and

ended up kicking them all to the bottom of the slide. The boy who was acting as

facilitator said, "Tim, why do you always have to mess up our games?" The other boy

replied, "I didn't want to play with you, I just wanted to slide, you dimwit" and stormed

off frustrated.

Date and time: Wednesday, May 14, 2003; 11:25-12:50
Setting: Playground for all three recesses.
Activities observed: 1st/2nd graders playing soccer on the soccer field. 3rd/4th grade
students playing a cooperative game on the blue plastic slide of a large wooden play
structure. Kindergartners playing 'ninjas' at various places in the schoolyard as well as
two children trying to find treasure by digging a hole under the metal play structure.
My interaction with the children: I spent 1st/2nd grade recess watching a large group of
boys playing soccer and talked about a game they like to play with role playing cards. I
watched the 3rd/4th graders play a game on the blue slide very closely and asked them to
be careful when they were doing something that seemed dangerous. I searched for
treasure and built a wall in the sand with two Kindergartners under the metal play
structure.

There was a group of third and fourth graders who played the same sliding game as the first and second graders a week later. One child acted as a facilitator and suggested that not only should they line up with their legs hanging off the side of the slide, but that they should do this in a uniform fashion so all of their legs were facing one direction before they commenced. Some of the children in the group seemed much more staunch about following the rules than the first and second graders, for example a girl said, "you're not sliding right, you're not following the rules." Where a boy who happened to be following the rules responded, "it's only a game—we don't need to follow the rules."

Participating in games with rules is an integral part of the social development of children. Games with rules first appear at five or six years of age and reach their zenith toward the end of elementary school (Seifert et al., 1997, p. 225). When analyzing these two examples of the same games with rules being established it is easy to see some differences between the two age groups. It is thought that the rules for many games with rules result from the more flexible rules of pretend play (Seifert et. al., p. 225). As children get older they tend to negotiate rules beforehand, rather than establish the rules as they play (Seifert et al.). This concept is illustrated by the first and second graders as a boy makes a suggestion to change the game they were playing from sliding down the slide in an orderly fashion to the children trying to line up side by side on the top half of the slide, whereas the third and fourth grade children ran out on to the playground and decided to slide to the middle of the slide with their legs all hanging off one side of the slide before they commenced with the game.

Games with rules are also helpful to children looking to enter into a group activity. Entry behavior involves a great deal of persistence as children are often rejected from a group multiple times before being accepted to join the activity. Phillips, Shenker and Revitz (1951) established a five-step sequence that is essential to a child's successful entry and assimilation into a group, involving the development of the same frame of reference of group members (as cited in Putallaz, & Wasserman, 1990, p. 65). . The child must first imitate group members behaviors; then attempt to initiate or influence a group activity (usually resulting in failure the first time around) and then a second and partially successful attempt at influencing some members of the group; this is followed by successful inclusion in group activities, and lastly they must be able to lead without being rejected (Putallaz, & Wasserman, p. 66). In order for children to learn about a group's frame of reference they must spend some time actively observing the play activity and learning how group members think and act. This was demonstrated by the first and second graders who watched the children take turns sliding for a few minutes before asking one of the children to join the game, as well as the children who just joined in the line who slid down the slide sideways like the children already engaged in the game. The importance of developing a frame of reference is further supported by the fact that the child sliding feet first was accused of messing up the game and received an angry response to his inability to follow rules by another child. The children who abided by the rules established by the children who initiated the game were not rejected; in fact, six out of seven children during the first and second grade recess successfully entered into the game!

Established games with rules make it easier for children to enter into activities, especially if the child is taking an activity oriented perspective on entry behavior. Children who have activity oriented goals are concerned about their entry into the group activity rather than their relation to other children or elevating their status within the group (Putallaz, & Wasserman, 1990, p. 72). They are more likely to be accepted by the group because they are not disrupting the group dynamics by attempting to change the course of the activity or lead the group. My observations of successful entry into the slide game coincides with this perspective as children who were allowed to play did not try to modify how they were playing the game, they simply slid in the same manner as the other children.

Children with poor entry skills are often rejected by their peers (as demonstrated by Tim who decided to slide feet first). According to sociometric techniques, rejected peers are classified as children "who are actively disliked and get many negative votes on sociometric measures of peer acceptance" (Berk, 2003, p. 609). They fall into two-subcategories: rejected-aggressive children and rejected-withdrawn children. Rejected-aggressive children demonstrate hostility, a high rate of conflict, and engage in impulsive behavior (Berk, p. 610). Rejected-withdrawn children are described as inhibited, passive, anxious, and often have negative ideas about their peers (Berk, p. 610). After further observations of Tim from the first and second grade recess he appears to be a rejected-aggressive child. This was demonstrated by his decision to slide down the slide feet forward and kick his peers already piled on the slide. It is also interesting to note that a different day on the playground I was pushing a group of students on the large tire swing

and Tim came over and was ready to initiate entry behavior, when two girls looked up and said, "Tim, go away you always mess up our games!" This rejection serves as a good example of reputation bias. Reputation bias is the idea that as a person behaves a certain way consistently over a period of time that eventually others come to expect that person to act a certain way at all times because "others attend to, interpret, and remember reputation" (Tan, personal communication). A person with a positive reputation often has the "halo effect" where they are seen as good regardless of their actions while a person with a negative reputation has the "horns effect" and his prosocial behavior is often dismissed as his behavior is incongruent with his reputation (Tan, personal communication). Tim was merely standing by the tire swing when his classmates simply assumed he was going to mess up their game based on past interactions with him. So, children who are rejected often times have trouble changing other people's opinions about them (due to reputation bias) regardless of the development of stronger social skills through social skills training programs. It is simply not enough to help children develop stronger social skills, it is often necessary to work with the child's peer group, school administration, and parents to change their perceptions of the child.

The concept of needing to work with various components of a child's life to delete a negative reputation bias coincides well with dynamic systems perspective. There are many components (such as environment, parents, teachers, friends, peers, and image of self, etc.) that interact together to form a dynamic system. In dynamic systems perspective the components are all interacting within the environment and at one very specific moment they come together to form a dynamic system creating the concept of

"soft assembly". There is no pre-established blueprint for the system, the system comes

together based on how the components interact with one another as the system is

constantly changing (Tan, personal communication). Frames eventually emerge from

these interactions between the interrelated components of the system and create patterns

that perpetuate the systems predictability (Pepler, Craig, & O'Connell, 1999). The

patterns of interactions (frames) that have emerged are difficult to breakdown and change

by merely modifying one aspect of the system, in order to change the system it is

necessary to attempt change multiple components of the system simultaneously (Pepler,

et al., p. 449). So, trying to help a rejected child become accepted reaches beyond

providing that child with social skills training, it is also necessary to coach his/her peers

and attempt to diminish their reputation bias, and involve teachers at school in assisting

the child with maintaining more positive interactions while also not allowing the child's

classmates to say negative things about him/her when he/she is behaving appropriately

towards other children. Thus, it is possible that in order for Tim to cease being rejected

by his peers a group effort is needed to not only modify his inappropriate behavior, but

also to help the other children see Tim in a more positive light.

Observation #5: The "Steve" and "Mark" Saga Unfolds

Date and time: Wednesday, May 7, 2003. 11:55-12:20
Setting: All over the playground.
Activities observed: Steve and Mark arguing with one another, Steve trying to avoid
Mark.
My interaction with the children: I watched children play tag and tried to talk to Mark
and Steve about problems they were having in their friendship.

I am choosing to focus particularly on seventh of May for my example of the interactions between "Steve" and "Mark", but before I begin describing the behavior I would like to note that I noticed the same type of problems occurring between the two children frequently through my seven weeks of playground duty at Woodward School. Steve and Mark are two white third or fourth grade students who have an interesting relationship: Mark always seems to want to play with Steve, while Steve attempts to branch out and participate in activities with other children. Mark will only play with other groups of children if Steve is also included in that activity, however, Mark does not have to be directly interacting with Steve while they are playing in a group of other children (Steve just needs to be present in order for Mark to play). On May seventh, Steve was wandering around by himself and Mark approached him and wanted to engage in sociodramatic play, Steve rejected Mark's offer and continued to wander around. Mark then sat down on the metal play structure and began to pout. I walked up to Mark and asked him what was wrong; he explained to me that Steve did not want to play with him today. He also told me that whenever they play together they never get to do what he wants to do; they always play what Steve wants to play. He then finished by saying "It feels like our friendship is fading away." Steve was by himself on the other half of the play structure walking around, so I went and asked him if he still considered Mark a friend. He informed me that he still considers Mark a friend, however, he was looking to play with other children this recess because he always plays with Mark. However, Mark was not in agreement with Steve's assessment; he claims that Mark never wants to play with him. Later during recess, Steve joined a group of about four children playing a game

on one of the larger wooden play structures, Mark then entered into the same group

without playing directly with Steve.

One of the most important aspects of social development to examine is the

development of friendships within peer groups. Friendships with peers vary a great deal

from children's relationships with parents. Children form vertical relationships with their

parents; in these vertical relationships reciprocity is not expected. The older person

(parent) is expected to sacrifice more and not necessarily anticipate receiving something in

return, whereas horizontal relationships usually occur voluntarily between people of the

same or are close in age (Tan, personal communication). "In this context of relationships

between equals, children learn norms of reciprocity and fairness, how to negotiate, manage

conflicts, be assertive, cooperate and collaborate" (Tan, personal communication). Thus,

in order for Steve and Mark to have a stable friendship it is necessary for them to

negotiate with one another. It sounds like Steve may struggle with this aspect of the

relationship, as he never wants to participate in the activities that Mark suggests. This

lack of compromise may be causing a large part of the tension between these two children.

It is also interesting to discuss how expectations within friendships change over

time, "before age eight the principal basis for friendship is common activity: Children

view a friend as someone who likes them and who enjoys similar kinds of play activities"

(Shaffer, 2000, p. 461). When children are very young their concept of reciprocity

involves the idea of equity. They give something and expect to be given something in

return immediately. However, this concept of reciprocity changes from equity to

equality over time. As children become older they begin to understand that although they

may give more at one period of time there will also be times when they will receive more than they are giving at that moment. As their concept of reciprocity begins to change their expectations of friendship are modified as well. Between the ages of eight and ten children begin to value friends whom they can trust, talk to, who are sensitive to their feelings, and loyal (Shaffer, p. 461). As children move into adolescence the concept of reciprocity begins to play an even larger role (beyond psychological similarities), as children expect an equal amount of give-and-take within the relationship over time (Shaffer, p. 461). Thus, at roughly nine or ten years old Mark may have a more mature understanding of friendship than Steve (as he values reciprocity more) causing him to feel that the "friendship is fading away". It is also possible that Steve is also moving towards the concept of valuing friends based on psychological similarities and does not relate well to Mark's ideas and emotions, thus causing him to distance himself from the relationship.

As I discussed earlier having a theory of mind is an extremely important component in developing relationships, as it is necessary to understand how other people's perceptions may be different from one's own. Selman's Role-taking theory hinges on this point; he "believes that in order to 'know' a person, one must be able to assume his perspective and understand his thoughts, feelings, motives, and intentions (Shaffer, 2000, p. 192). So, in order for a child to have any depth within their relationships they must be able to understand others' internal factors in order to be able to describe that person with any psychological depth. Selman's theory is comprised of four different levels of role taking abilities. The zero stage is, "egocentric or undifferentiated perspective" and occurs between the ages of 3 and six. Children do not

understand that anyone has a perspective other than their own (Shaffer, p. 192). The

first stage occurs between six and eight years of age and is referred to as, "social-

informational role-taking". "Children now recognize that people can have perspectives

that differ from their own but believe that this happens because these individuals have

received different information" (Shaffer, p. 193). The second stage is called, "self-

reflective role taking" and takes place between the ages of eight and ten. "Children now

know that their own and others' point of view may conflict even if they have received the

same information…However, the child cannot consider his own perspective and that of

another person at the same time" (Shaffer, p. 193). The third stage is then referred to as,

"mutual role taking" and occurs between ten and twelve years of age. The main

component of this stage is that a child can now consider his/her perspective as well as

another person's perspective at the same time and assume the role of a disinterested

third-party (Shaffer, p. 193). The fourth and final stage to this process is called; "societal

role taking" and children begin to illustrate this concept between twelve and fifteen years

of age. "The adolescent now attempts to understand another person's perspective by

comparing it with that of the social system in which he operates" (Shaffer, p. 193). As

we can see the changes in children's ability to take the perspective of others are extremely

important to the development of friendships with peers as their thinking becomes less

and less self-interested over time. If a child takes a longer period of time than most of

their counterparts to move through Selman's stages it is possible that those children will

be less liked by their peers because they have difficulty operating with the same concepts

of reciprocity and perspective-taking as other children and find it difficult to form

friendships within the peer group.

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